

Description

HIGH PERFORMANCE STRAINED CMOS DEVICES

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0001] The invention generally relates to a semiconductor device and method of manufacture and, more particularly, to a complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) device that includes shallow trench isolations (STI) overhanging interfaces thus preventing oxidation induced compressive stresses in the device.

[0002] CMOS devices may be fabricated using various process techniques. One method entails fabricating strained Silicon (Si) layers on relaxed Silicon Germanium (SiGe) layers. As the Germanium (Ge) concentration increases, strain in the Si lattice increases. This is significant because such strain affects performance (e.g., electron and hole mobility). While strain may improve electron mobility in n-channel field effect transistors (nFETs), performance improvement (i.e., enhancement of hole mobility) in p-

channel field effect transistors (p-FETs) poses a greater challenge. Hole mobility in a pFET initially exhibits a slight degradation at low amount of tensile strain, but increases linearly with higher strain.

[0003] Compressive stress applied in the longitudinal direction with respect to the current flow may cause a significant increase in hole mobility, but may also degrade electron mobility. The shallow trench isolation (STI) process commonly used in CMOS fabrications to isolate discrete components to prevent interference is susceptible to volume expansion induced stress caused by oxidation. This stress can substantially affect performance, such as adversely by decreasing nFET electron mobility.

[0004] In particular, Si located adjacent to the vertical portion of an STI is susceptible to oxidation induced stress. The Si may become oxidized during gate oxidation or reoxidation of a gate stack. The oxidized portion may exhibit significantly increased thickness due to the use of multiple gate oxidations, which is common in fabricating high performance logic circuits. The increased thickness induces stress in the silicon active area, which can affect performance, such as adversely by decreasing nFET electron mobility.

[0005] The effect on performance of such oxidation induced compressive stresses is magnified when the source of the stress is close to a transistor gate. Modern CMOS chips have millions of active devices side by side in a common silicon substrate. As efforts to miniaturize and incorporate more active devices on a single substrate continue, it becomes increasingly likely that such sources of stress will be close enough to appreciably impact performance.

[0006] The invention is directed to overcoming one or more of the problems as set forth above.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

[0007] In a first aspect of the invention a semiconductor structure is formed on a substrate, comprising at least one shallow trench isolation having at least one overhang selectively configured to prevent oxidation induced stress in a determined portion of the substrate.

[0008] In another aspect of the invention, a semiconductor structure is formed on a substrate. The structure includes a first field effect transistor having a source, a drain, a gate, and a direction of current flow from the source to the drain. The structure also includes a first shallow trench isolation for the first field effect transistor. The first shallow trench isolation has at least one overhang configured

to prevent oxidation induced stress in a direction parallel to the direction of current flow for the first field effect transistor.

[0009] In a further aspect of the invention, a process of forming a semiconductor structure is provided. The process entails forming a first shallow trench isolation. The shallow trench isolation has at least one overhang configured to prevent oxidation induced stress in a first determined direction. In the process, a structure is formed comprising a silicon layer, a silicon dioxide layer on the silicon layer, and a silicon nitride layer on the silicon dioxide layer. A portion of the silicon nitride layer, the silicon dioxide layer and the silicon substrate is etched to form a trench. Side-wall portions of the silicon nitride layer in the trench are etched to create a recession of the silicon nitride layer relative to the trench. A shallow trench isolation is formed in the trench, which in embodiments has an overhang.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0010] Figure 1 shows a silicon substrate with oxide and nitride layers for use in accordance with an exemplary implementation of the invention;

[0011] Figure 2 shows a silicon substrate with patterned photoresist images on a nitride surface for use in accordance

with an exemplary implementation of the invention;

[0012] Figure 3 shows an etched semiconductor structure with trenches for use in accordance with an exemplary implementation of the invention;

[0013] Figure 4 shows a semiconductor structure having shallow trench isolations for use in accordance with an exemplary implementation of the invention;

[0014] Figure 5 shows a semiconductor structure having shallow trench isolations with overhangs for use in accordance with an exemplary implementation of the invention;

[0015] Figure 6 shows a semiconductor structure having shallow trench isolations with overhangs after removal of a nitride layer and reduction of oxide thickness;

[0016] Figure 7 shows a top plan view of an active device (e.g., an nFET or pFET) surrounded by a shallow trench isolation;

[0017] Figure 8 shows a pFET device in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

[0018] Figure 9 shows an nFET device in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

[0019] Figure 10 shows a parallel-to-gate view of an exemplary pFET device having STI overhangs in the direction transverse to current flow; and

[0020] Figure 11 shows a parallel-to-gate view of an nFET device

having STI overhangs in the direction transverse to current flow.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0021] The invention employs a silicon nitride (Si_3N_4) pull-back process in combination with a mask used to prevent the Si_3N_4 pull-back from being executed in the longitudinal components of some or all pFET devices. The resulting semiconductor structure has overhang structures (referred to herein as overhang, SiO_2 overhang, and STI overhang) present for nFET devices in the directions of and transverse to current flow. To enhance performance due to compressive stresses, no silicon dioxide (SiO_2) overhang is present in the direction parallel to the direction of current flow for pFET devices.

[0022] However, the structure has SiO_2 overhangs in the direction transverse to current flow for pFET devices to avoid performance degradation from compressive stresses. The overhang structures prevent oxidation by blocking access to underlying Si. Without an overhang, Si at the vertical Si- SiO_2 interface adjacent to the shallow trench isolation would be susceptible to oxidation and attendant volume expansion, especially during gate oxidation and reoxidation process steps. It is believed that the resulting semi-

conductor structure enables pFET performance improvement with little or no nFET performance degradation. Additionally, the overhang structure is detectable using standard failure analysis techniques such as scanning electron microscopy (SEM).

[0023] Referring to Figure 1, a silicon substrate 110, a pad silicon dioxide (SiO_2) layer 120 and a pad silicon nitride (Si_3N_4) layer 130 are provided. By way of example, the silicon substrate may be a silicon wafer, an epitaxial layer formed on a silicon wafer or a silicon-on-insulator (SOI) substrate. The silicon dioxide layer 120 may be about 2nm to 70nm thick, and may be deposited or grown on the wafer. For example, the silicon dioxide layer 120 may be formed by thermal oxidation or by low pressure chemical vapor deposition (LPCVD). Next, the silicon nitride layer 130, in the range of about 10 to 400nm, may be deposited by LPCVD.

[0024] Referring now to Figure 2, a photolithography process may then be carried out to pattern photoresist images 210 over the silicon nitride layer 130. The inverse pattern may then be etched using a dry or wet etch process (e.g., by reactive ion etching using the patterned photoresist as a mask) to form trench structures, as is well known in the

art.

[0025] Referring now to Figure 3, the dry or wet etch process may be carried out to etch the silicon nitride 130, silicon dioxide 120 and some amount of the silicon substrate 110 not covered by the photoresist image 210. In this manner, trenches 310 and 320 are formed through layers 110, 120 and 130.

[0026] Next, referring to Figure 4, the trenches 310 and 320 may be filled with SiO_2 , such as by depositing SiO_2 over the surface of the substrate using, for example, a chemical vapor deposition (CVD) or plasma CVD process. The deposited SiO_2 may then be planarized using, for example, reactive ion etching (RIE), chemical mechanical polishing, or a combination thereof. In this manner, shallow trench isolations 410 and 420 are formed. These shallow trench isolations 410 and 420 do not exhibit overhang.

[0027] To form a shallow trench isolation with an overhang, before deposition of SiO_2 to fill the trench, portions of the silicon nitride layer 130 are etched, causing them to recede or pull-back relative to the side walls of the trench, as shown in Figure 5. The silicon nitride layer 130 may be etched (i.e., "pulled back"), for example, by introducing an etchant such as a glycerated buffered hydrofluoric acid in

trenches 310 and 320 prior to oxide deposition and chemical mechanical polishing. The amount of silicon nitride to be etched in this step will depend upon the overall manufacturing process into which the teachings of this invention are incorporated. In general, the amount should be sufficient to enable formation of an overhang that is sufficient to prevent oxidation in a determined portion of the device. However, the overhang should not interfere with other structures on the device. By way of example and not limitation, an overhang that extends beyond the STI-substrate interface by 0.01 μm to 0.5 μm (microns) should be sufficient to prevent oxidation without causing interference.

[0028] To control where overhangs are formed, a photoresist or hardmask may be selectively applied to prevent etchant (e.g., glycerated buffered hydrofluoric acid) from undercutting determined areas. Areas protected by a photoresist or hardmask would not exhibit pull-back required for the formation of overhangs. Processes for depositing and patterning a hardmask or photoresist are known in the art of semiconductor fabrication. The hardmask or photoresist may then be removed in subsequent processing steps.

[0029] Then, upon deposition of the SiO_2 and planarization, for

example, RIE or chemical mechanical polishing, the structures 510 and 520 are formed, as shown in Figure 5. Portions of SiO_2 122–128 (Figure 6) from the oxide layer 120 may remain after trench formation and pull-back. As these portions 122–128 are comprised of the same material as the T-shaped structures 510 and 520, the portions are not distinguished from the T-shaped structures in subsequent Figures.

[0030] As the silicon nitride layer 130 is pulled-back from the side walls of the trench, the shallow trench isolation structures of Figure 5 form T-shapes or a stepped portion 510a and 520a, respectively (e.g., a narrow portion embedded in the layers 110 and 120) thus forming the overhang over layer 120. Thus, the top horizontal portions or stepped portions 510a and 520a, respectively, of these shallow trench isolation structures 510 and 520 now overhang the vertical Si– SiO_2 interfaces 620 626 and therefore inhibit oxidation of the Si portions of the interfaces. Consequently, oxidation induced compression may be prevented in the channel region.

[0031] Thus, pull-back enables formation of an overhang of deposited SiO_2 , thereby protecting the covered vertical portion of Si at the Si– SiO_2 interfaces 620 626 from being

oxidized. Oxidation-induced stresses, which might otherwise degrade performance, may be suppressed by the overhang. A CMOS circuit comprising an nFET may have STI structures with overhangs in the direction parallel to the direction of current flow and in the direction transverse to current flow to prevent oxidation of Si along the Si-SiO₂ interfaces. In contrast, a pFET device may have an overhang in the transverse direction, but no overhang in the direction parallel to the direction of current flow in accordance with Figure 4.

[0032] Next, in Figure 6, the silicon nitride layer 130 (Figure 5) is removed by hot phosphoric acid, for example. At this point, well implants to form source and drain regions, which are used in a conventional process flow, are carried out. A timed hydrofluoric acid etch may then be used to prepare the silicon surface for gate oxidation. The oxide layers 120, 510 and 520 are reduced in thickness by such etching.

[0033] While exemplary materials and STI overhang formation and semiconductor fabrication processes have been described, the invention is not limited in these respects. Additional and different materials and fabrication steps, including different etchants and pull-back and overhang

formation techniques, may be applied without departing from the scope of the invention.

[0034] Each active device in a semiconductor may have a shallow trench isolation that surrounds the device. Typically the shallow trench isolation includes four sides. By way of example and not limitation, Figure 7 provides a top plan view of a shallow trench isolation 710 surrounding an active device comprised of a gate electrode 720 and an active silicon area 730. The shallow trench isolation 710 includes two sides 740 and 750 parallel to the direction of current flow and two sides 760 and 770 transverse to the direction of current flow. Furthermore, the sides may have STI overhangs or may be devoid of overhangs. An overhang on side 740 and/or 750, which are sides parallel to the direction of current flow, is an overhang parallel to the direction of current flow. An overhang on side 760 and/or 770, which are sides transverse to the direction of current flow, is an overhang transverse to the direction of current flow.

[0035] Referring now to Figure 8, an exemplary pFET device is shown. The exemplary device includes a shallow trench isolation with sides 410 and 420 without overhangs in the direction parallel to the direction of current flow. STI over-

hangs may be provided in the transverse direction for pFETs. The active device may be comprised of conventional gate dielectric 845, a gate electrode 830 and sidewall spacers 820 and 835 all formed in a conventional manner. Silicide (e.g., TiSi_2 , TaSi_2 or MoSi_2) 810 and 840 for source and drain contacts may also be provided.

[0036] Referring now to Figure 9, an exemplary nFET device is shown. The device includes a shallow trench isolation with sides 510 and 520 having overhangs in the direction parallel to the direction of current flow. The active device may be comprised of conventional gate dielectric 945, a gate electrode 930 and sidewall spacers 920 and 940. Silicide (e.g., TiSi_2 , TaSi_2 or MoSi_2) 910 and 950 for source and drain contacts may also be provided. The overhangs prevent oxidation induced bird's beak formation near the vertical Si-SiO_2 interface. Thus, oxidation induced compressive stresses, which would degrade electron mobility of the nFET, are avoided.

[0037] Referring now to Figure 10, a cross-sectional parallel-to-gate 930 view of a pFET device in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the invention shows STI overhangs 1010 and 1020 in the direction transverse to current flow. The STI overhangs 1010 and 1020 prevent oxi-

duction induced compressive stress formations (e.g., bird's beak formations) in the transverse direction, thus preventing a degradation of hole mobility. The STI overhangs in the transverse direction may be formed using a technique (e.g., a silicon nitride pullback process), as used to form STI overhangs in the direction parallel to the direction of current flow.

[0038] Similarly, Figure 11 provides a cross-sectional parallel-to-gate 830 view of an exemplary nFET device which shows STI overhangs 1110 and 1120 in the direction transverse to current flow. The STI overhangs 1110 and 1120 prevent oxidation induced compressive stress formations in the transverse direction, thus preventing a degradation of electron mobility. Again, the STI overhangs in the transverse direction may be formed using a technique (e.g., a silicon nitride pullback process) as used to form STI overhangs in the direction parallel to the direction of current flow.

[0039] Stress effects are inversely related to distance from the active device. The closer the source of oxidation induced compressive stresses is to an active device, the greater the impact on performance. Conversely, the greater the distance between a field effect transistor gate and a

source of oxidation induced compressive stress (e.g., a bird's beak formation), the less appreciable the influence on performance. Furthermore, sources of oxidation induced compressive stress (e.g., bird's beak formations) that are more than a determined distance from a determined active structure (e.g., the nearest edge of a transistor gate) may not appreciably affect performance (e.g., electron or hole mobility) for that structure. Consequently, in one embodiment of the invention, STI overhangs may be implemented if the distance between the STI and the determined structure is less than or equal to the determined distance. The determined distance may vary depending upon factors that may influence the magnitude of stress induced. Such factors may include, by way of example, thermal mismatch between the isolation, dielectric and silicon substrate; intrinsic stress of a nitride mask; as well as fabrication steps and conditions. Because a stress source beyond that distance may not have an appreciable effect on performance, in such a case formation of STI overhangs may not be warranted for stress reduction purposes. By way of example and not limitation, a distance of 5.0 μ (microns) or greater from a nearest edge of an nFET or pFET gate may be sufficient to avoid performance

degradation.

[0040] STI overhang structures in accordance with an exemplary implementation may therefore be selectively configured to prevent bird's beak formations where compressive stresses caused by such formations would degrade performance. Considerations such as the type of device (e.g., nFET or pFET), the distance from the active device and the direction of current flow may influence whether an overhang should be formed and the arrangement of the overhang. While STI overhangs may be provided in both the directions parallel and transverse to the direction of current flow for nFETs; a pFET may have an STI overhang in the transverse direction, but should not have an overhang, in embodiments, in the parallel direction. The selective configuration may further take into account the distance between an STI and the active device (e.g., the distance between an STI and a nearby gate). If the distance prevents bird's beak formations adjacent to the STI from having any appreciable effects on performance, then overhangs may be omitted.

[0041] While the invention has been described in terms of exemplary embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that the invention can be practiced with modifications and

in the spirit and scope of the appended claims.